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RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

THE INTERNATIONAL CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON CHRONICLES

This is the latest volume[1] of the "International Critical Commentary," the most important work on the Bible produced by the American and English scholars of the present day. Of the series in general it may be affirmed that the volumes covering the Old Testament are on the whole more satisfactory than those on the New Testament. That fact is due largely, it may be presumed, to the vastly freer work which for a generation has been done in the former field. While there are many unsolved problems still in the Hebrew biblical literature, there are numerous important points which are settled so far as present knowledge permits.

Professor Curtis' contribution seems to be on a level with the best of the commentaries in this series, and some of his predecessors had already made the standard high. It is especially satisfactory to have a worthy treatment of Chronicles; for there has been nothing in English to which the student could turn, and unfortunately most American theological students are limited to their native tongue.

Chronicles originally covered the two books still known by that name and the books of Ezra-Nehemiah as well. Therefore it is in its early form a history of the Jews from Adam to the Greek period. But since for the early period there is practically nothing but lists of names (I, 1–9), Chronicles as we use the term covers the history from the time of David to the Exile. Now, that period is already included in our books of Samuel and Kings. What then was the purpose of a writer who proposed to rewrite that great period of Hebrew history? To begin with a negative, it is certain that he had no narrow view of the inspiration and infallibility of the earlier histories; for he uses them at times with great freedom; and it is plain that he wrote his book because he was not satisfied with his predecessors' interpretation of the events they recorded.

[1] *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles.* By Edward Lewis Curtis, Ph.D., D.D., Professor of the Hebrew Language and Literature in the Divinity School of Yale University, and Albert Alonzo Madsen, Ph.D. New York: Scribner, 1910. xxii+534 pages. $3.

To get the author's point of view there are three matters in which he shows a compelling interest, genealogical records, the Davidic dynasty, and the Temple with all other institutions connected with its worship. He was therefore an antiquarian, a somewhat narrow Jewish patriot, and an enthusiastic devotee of the priestly law. His personal traits are not only discoverable in his work, but they also exerted a strong influence upon his composition, to so great a degree indeed that his work is far removed from the plane of scientific history, and degenerates frequently to apologetics, a noble enough science in its place, but out of its element when it colors historical narrative.

Whence did the Chronicler derive the material for his history? We may disregard revelation without prejudice, for in that we follow the author, for he claims only written sources for his work. In the first place he makes liberal use of the narrative portions of Genesis-Kings, as we may see from the table given by Curtis (pp. 17–19), the most complete list of the parallels known to me. Then the Chronicler cites a number of other authorities, partly annals of Kings, partly prophetic writings or biographies. For the full list see Curtis, *Introduction*, pp. 21 ff. Right here we come to the most mooted problem in this field. As a matter of fact, did the Chronicler have any written sources, or did he merely cite authorities, somewhat after the fashion proposed to the perplexed de Cervantes by his friend,[2] merely to embellish his narrative and to give an appearance of authenticity, as alleged by some scholars of the present day?

The Chronicler wrote certainly as late as 300 B.C., and very possibly a century later. The late date is one of the grounds for distrusting his sources. Too much has been built upon the question of date. The best American histories are usually those of most recent date. So far as date goes, a far better history might have been written in the third century than in the fifth. The author of Kings wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem, yet he certainly had written sources, from which he took what served his purpose; but he surely did not use all the material he had before him. If old sources were available for him in the exilic period, there is no reason why original writings may not have survived to the time of the Chronicler.

But it is urged that all of the matter peculiar to the Chronicler shows the same literary style, being full of words, phrases, and constructions used only or chiefly by him. There is much force in this argument, and yet it is not so convincing as often alleged. For the Book of

[2] See author's preface to *Don Quixote*.

Chronicles, in its full form, betrays evidence of much revision or successive editing. A thorough criticism of the text that is common to Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah and I Esdras shows abundant traces of that overhauling. It is certain that our Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah differs materially from the form which first left the hands of its author.

It is charged further that the Chronicler deliberately falsifies the history in places where we have a control, and therefore no confidence can be placed in his unsupported statements. It is true that in these books we have a general increase of numbers over those of the earlier books (see *Introd.*, pp. 8 ff., where there is an excellent statement of changes and exaggerations), and there are many other variations from the sources which cannot be justified. And yet it is by no means sure that modern scholars have not been too sweeping in denying historical worth to Chronicles. To cite one of the large matters, these books attribute to David the institution of much of the Temple cult in its broadest sense; the religious institutions of the third century are traced back to a Davidic origin. Certainly there is exaggeration here. Our author belonged to an age in which it was the fashion to give to every writing the support of a great name, and so all laws were given by Moses, all psalms were sung by David, and all wisdom came from the mouth of Solomon. And yet, for all that we know, David, who in the earlier part of his reign was a real head of state and church, may have set up many of the religious institutions which are usually regarded now as springing from a much later period. David was certainly a poet, and therefore to him were ascribed songs he never composed; and David was a profoundly religious man, and therefore too much may be credited to him; but it is also true that we may take away from him many institutions which he did originate.

In dealing with this and other similar problems Professor Curtis certainly does not take a very conservative position. On the other hand, he is fully as clear of an extreme tendency to discard as worthless any statement which may safely be labeled by that assumed tag of unreliability, "Chr." He takes each section of the peculiar material and considers it on its own merits. For the most part his conclusions come to the radical position, but he does not assume that place at the outset. He does finally accept some of the Chronicler's narrative at least as probable.

Again, Curtis is cautious in pronouncing opinions, and is confessedly content with many "probablys." In dealing with books like these, that course is necessary, although in places his caution is carried to

needless points. For example, he says of I Chron., chap. 9, "The chapter seems related to Neh., chap. 11, through their both having a common source." Curtis admits the possibility that both may be free fancies of the Chronicler, as Meyer and others contend. As a matter of fact, it seems clear that the list is the same in both places, just as the list in Neh., chap. 7, is the same as that in Ezra, chap. 2, and the problem of the repetition, a difficult one by the way in spite of many easy proffered solutions, is similar in the two cases. At all events, it is not stranger that the Chronicler should have repeated a list in Chronicles and in Nehemiah, than that he should do the same thing in Ezra and Nehemiah.

There is an excellent and exhaustive bibliography, there is a good index, and perhaps the best list of words and phrases which are characteristic of the books. In connection with the last, it may be well to quote the author's caution: "Words or expressions marked *rare* or *peculiar* may have been in common usage in the Chronicler's day, this statement being due merely to our meager supply of literature of that period" (p. 28).

He who reads Chronicles with the aid of this commentary will discover how greatly this book contributes to our knowledge of the religious conditions of the third century B.C., and will be able to get about as much light on difficult and obscure subjects as the scholarship of the present day affords. The preparation of such a volume, if done at all creditably, involves an enormous amount of rather dry labor; and it may be said that Professor Curtis appears not to have shrunk from the task when it became most irksome.

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THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR STUDENTS

The third volume[1] of the series under the general title "The Student's Old Testament" is now published. When the six are complete the Old Testament material will have been covered in a comprehensive as well as in a critical and suggestive manner. These books are suitable for the reader as well as the student, and they should help to lessen the truth of the statement that the Bible, or at least the Old Testament part of it, is one of the books that is most studied and least read. We

[1] *The Sermons, Epistles, and Apocalypses of Israel's Prophets.* From the Beginning of the Assyrian Period to the End of the Maccabean Struggle. By Charles Foster Kent, Ph.D. With Maps and Chronological Charts. New York: Scribner, 1910. 516 pages. $2.75.